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1 — After Arkema plans, safety board urges industry to rethink emergency plans, Houston Chronicle, 11/15/17

<http://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/After-Arkema-plans-safety-board-urges-industry-12360601.php>

The U.S. Chemical Safety Board, concerned about the increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters, is warning the chemical industry to rethink its emergency plans in light of the Arkema fires in Crosby.

2 — Deposition: Former state seismologist felt pressured not to link Oklahoma quakes with man-made causes, Houston Chronicle, 11/15/17

http://www.tulsaworld.com/earthquakes/deposition-former-state-seismologist-felt-pressured-not-to-link-oklahoma/article_19c0dfb1-fc12-5a9f-8aa7-eea06d829d8e.html

The state's former top seismologist was reprimanded by a University of Oklahoma official for publishing a study on mitigating induced seismicity and felt pressured not to link Oklahoma's earthquakes with man-made causes, according to his testimony in a lawsuit.

3 — Parties pledge new thinking to solve interstate water fight, Albuquerque Journal, 11/15/17

<https://www.abqjournal.com/1093125/parties-pledge-new-thinking-to-solve-interstate-water-fight.html>

Farmers in southern New Mexico, water policy experts, lawyers and others are all working behind the scenes to craft possible solutions that could help to end a lengthy battle with Texas over management of the Rio Grande.

4 — 'This Is an Emergency': 1 Million African Americans Live Near Oil, Gas Facilities, Albuquerque Journal, 11/15/17

<https://www.abqjournal.com/1093394/work-begins-on-1-9-million-los-padillas-water-system.html>

A new analysis concludes what many in African-American communities have long experienced: Low-income, black Americans are disproportionately exposed to toxic air pollution from the fossil fuel industry.

5 — Los Padillas water project begins, Albuquerque Journal, 11/15/17

<http://nhpr.org/post/some-native-americans-uranium-contamination-feels-discrimination#stream/0>

Workers broke ground this week on a \$1.9 million project to install water lines in Los Padillas, bringing municipal water to an area where homeowners now rely on private wells.

6 — Simulation: Harvey-level storm flooding would inundate central San Antonio, San Antonio Express-News, 11/15/17

<http://www.expressnews.com/news/local/article/Simulation-Harvey-level-storm-flooding-would-12361076.php>

If a storm with the ferocity of Hurricane Harvey hit San Antonio, the river and creeks would swell and inundate the Broadway corridor, Mahncke Park, River Road, Tobin Hill, the River Walk and South Town.

7 — Secretary Serious About Environmental Quality, WRKF, 11/16/17

<http://wrkf.org/post/louisianas-share-exxon-settlement>

For years, it's been joked that DEQ stands for "don't even question," since Louisiana allows its industrial plants to self-report hazardous releases. "There's some entities, if they have a release, they'll say, 'Well, nothing left the fence line,'" Dr. Chuck Carr Brown acknowledges.

8 — Neighborhood residents, school protest plan for new concrete batching plant near Boerne, San Antonio Express-News, 11/16/17

<http://www.expressnews.com/news/local/article/Neighborhood-residents-school-protest-plan-for-12357991.php>

Vulcan Materials' move to establish a concrete batching plant off Texas 46 about 8 miles east of town is drawing scrutiny from Kendall County and strong opposition from a nearby school and adjoining neighborhoods.

9 — Conservationists urge action by Louisiana to restore, protect critical Maurepas Swamp, Baton Rouge Advocate, 11/16/17

http://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/environment/article_99f90816-c97d-11e7-b3da-7b1d710a7145.html

Conservation groups want to see the trees tower over the marshes once again. They have implored the state to fast track several environmental projects across south Louisiana, three of which would redirect water into the Maurepas Swamp.

10 — Environmental groups tell state to prioritize 17 Louisiana coastal projects, New Orleans Times-Picayune, 11/16/17

http://www.nola.com/environment/index.ssf/2017/11/coalition_of_national_and_loca.html#incart_river_index

Louisiana should prioritize proposed Mississippi River diversions west of Lake Pontchartrain in response to expected sea level rise, which is putting projects closer to the Gulf at risk, a coalition of national and local environmental groups said.

11 — U.S. biofuels policy contributes to global warming: study, Reuters, 11/16/17

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-biofuels-study/u-s-biofuels-policy-contributes-to-global-warming-study-idUSKBN1DF31W>

U.S. renewable fuel mandates are contributing to global warming, boosting carbon emissions as farmers turn carbon-rich areas like wetlands and forests into cropland to grow corn, soy and wheat for biofuels production, a study presented on Wednesday said.

Chron <http://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/After-Arkema-plans-safety-board-urges-industry-12360601.php>

After Arkema plans, safety board urges industry to rethink emergency plans

Panel probing Arkema says chemical firms must better prepare

By **Matt Dempsey** Updated 7:14 pm, Wednesday, November 15, 2017



IMAGE 1 OF 12

A tank at the Arkema plant on Saturday, Nov. 11, 2017, in Crosby.

The U.S. Chemical Safety Board, concerned about the increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters, is warning the chemical industry to rethink its emergency plans in light of the Arkema fires in Crosby.

Hurricane Harvey dumped more than 6 feet of water on the Arkema plant. Floodwaters caused the site to lose the ability to keep volatile organic peroxides cool, leading to massive fires over multiple days.

Arkema asserts in documents obtained by the Houston Chronicle from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that the level of flooding from Harvey could not have been predicted. The Crosby location had not received more than 20 inches of flooding in its history, according to the company.

At a news conference Wednesday, safety board Chairwoman Vanessa Allen Sutherland warned companies to not use the past to predict the impact of future storms.

"No one has a crystal ball, but we don't want people to be lulled into a false sense that the plan they may have done two or three years ago is still going to be adequate," Sutherland said.

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She cautioned that storms are going to increase in frequency and intensity and companies need to be prepared. She said the safety board's review of the Arkema fires would have significant implications for the chemical industry.

"We're hoping our investigation will have broad national impact," Sutherland said.

A Chronicle investigation into the Arkema chemical fires revealed the company was not prepared for more than 3 feet of flooding, leading to a number of critical equipment failures. The company's emergency response plan contained only one paragraph about flooding. Its main power and backup generators were not high enough off the ground to prevent floodwaters from inundating them. The diesel-fueled freezer trailers the company used as its last line of defense failed once floodwaters got into the fuel tanks that were 3 feet off the ground.

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How companies reassess their worst-case scenarios in light of an increase in intense storms such as Harvey is the "crux of this investigation," said Mark Wingard, the safety board's lead investigator on the Arkema case.

"A number of facilities had flooding along the Gulf Coast," Wingard said. "Was the guidance we had at the time sufficient?"

Arkema bought the facility in 1960, before flood maps were even around. But in 2007, updated maps put the Crosby plant inside the 100-year flood plain, Wingard said. Yet there are no regulations requiring companies in a flood plain to elevate generators or backup power.

Companies need to go beyond the rules and guidelines when considering how to prepare for floods, Wingard said, even though there are no federal rules that say they must.

The safety board is still in the early stages of its investigation, which will include what harmed first responders and Crosby residents in the aftermath of the chemical fires. Investigators were scheduled to talk to those affected by chemical releases from Arkema in the coming weeks. Wingard said the company has been cooperative.

Sutherland, the chairwoman, tried to reassure the Crosby community that the board's investigators would get to the bottom of what happened.

"I can absolutely understand why and how they are feeling the way they are feeling, even without knowing specifically what might have been in the air," Sutherland said. "We want people to be able to feel comfortable being near a facility, and that is part of reason we focus on communities and having facilities tell people ... even before an explosion or fire occurs, what they're storing and what the consequences could be if there is a catastrophic event."

The safety board is hoping to publish its full investigation into the Arkema fires before the next hurricane season starts in June.

Mark Collette contributed to this report.

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http://www.tulsaworld.com/earthquakes/deposition-former-state-seismologist-felt-pressured-not-to-link-oklahoma/article_19c0dfb1-fc12-5a9f-8aa7-eea06d829d8e.html

Deposition: Former state seismologist felt pressured not to link Oklahoma quakes with man-made causes

By Corey Jones Tulsa World Nov 15, 2017



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In this file photo from 2015, Austin Holland, who was then working as a state seismologist with the Oklahoma Geologic Survey, works to install a new seismograph in the ground in a rural part of southwest Oklahoma City. JOHN CLANTON/Tulsa World

Correction: This story originally misstated the date of the Prague earthquakes. The story has been corrected.

The state's former top seismologist was reprimanded by a University of Oklahoma official for publishing a study on mitigating induced seismicity and felt pressured not to link Oklahoma's earthquakes with man-made causes, according to his testimony in a lawsuit.

Austin Holland's sworn statements from a recent deposition contradict public statements OU President David Boren made to the Tulsa World in 2015. Boren repeatedly stated that the university and its donors never exerted influence or pressure on Oklahoma Geological Survey scientists researching the state's unprecedented seismicity.

When reached recently by the Tulsa World, Boren and the former dean of the Earth and Energy College disputed Holland's testimony that the university or its officials applied pressure on or punished him for his research.

Holland's deposition was taken on Oct. 11 in an ongoing lawsuit filed in 2015 by Jennifer Cooper against New Dominion and Spess Oil Co. for damages sustained in the 2011 Prague earthquakes.

Holland described how he was "disappointed" and "devastated" to receive a reprimand for helping publish a peer-reviewed journal article on how to cope with man-made earthquakes. He said he decided that he "couldn't take any more" and starting to search for a new position.

The reprimand came during the period before the paper was released to media outlets, Holland stated. The research, on which he is listed as a co-author, was published in February 2015. In July 2015, it became public that Holland was leaving the Oklahoma Geological Survey to pursue a job with the U.S. Geological Survey.

The Oklahoma Geological Survey is a state agency administered by OU.

"And so, you know, it was sort of like realizing that I could no longer be a scientist in an environment that I thought was my perfect job was really disheartening. ... But after being reprimanded for publishing a paper, I felt like I had just lost my dream job in one conversation," Holland testified.

"And the warning signs were there as far as being asked to remove presentations from scientific meetings and other things. It was — having my words edited by the dean was certainly, you know, some warning signs. But that was pretty much the turning point."

Holland specifically identified Larry Grillot, former dean of the Mewbourne College of Earth and Energy, and Randy Keller, former director of the Oklahoma Geological Survey, as influencing and altering wording in his research or presentations.

Holland responded with both of their names when a plaintiff's attorney asked who pressured him to avoid linking the Prague-area earthquakes with saltwater injection by the oil and gas industry.

Holland's testimony also offered details of a meeting that took place with Boren and Harold Hamm, a donor of millions of dollars to OU who founded oil and gas company Continental Resources. Holland said he was called into the president's office after he wrote a paper discussing hydraulic fracturing as a trigger for some earthquakes in Oklahoma.

"Well, the president of the university expressed to me that I had complete academic freedom but that as part of being an employee of the state survey, I also have a need to listen to, you know, the people within the oil and gas industry," Holland said. "And so Harold Hamm expressed to me that I had to be careful of the way in which I say things, that hydraulic fracturing is critical to the state's economy in Oklahoma, and that me publicly stating that earthquakes can be caused by hydraulic fracturing was — you know, could be misleading, and that he was nervous about the war on fossil fuels at the time."

Holland's testimony contradicts what Boren told the Tulsa World in an interview responding to a June 2015 EnergyWire story that reported that the Oklahoma Geological Survey waffled on its findings related to the state's rapidly growing number of earthquakes.

Boren repeatedly told the Tulsa World that work at the university was never compromised by Hamm or any other donor.

"No researcher at the Oklahoma Geological Survey ... has ever received pressure from the university to change their research or to slow their research," Boren told the World in June 2015. "There has been no pressure about their research in any way."

In a recent written response to questions posed by the Tulsa World, Boren said he hasn't seen the full deposition and can't respond to Holland's specific comments.

"I was not privy to conversations within the department about the academic merits of particular scientific publications or reports," Boren wrote. "As I have expressed publicly and to Dr. Holland personally, OGS researchers have full academic freedom.

"Dr. Holland himself stated in a 2015 media report, 'We have the academic freedoms necessary for university employees doing research.' Our commitment to academic freedom is paramount."

Boren's statement also lauded the research of the OGS.

"We have learned that wastewater disposal has contributed to increased seismicity specifically based on the pioneering research provided by the Oklahoma Geological Survey," Boren said. "The university stands by OGS researchers and is proud to have played a role in this important scientific finding, which is being used to protect the safety and well-being of Oklahomans."

Regarding his reprimand from the College of Earth and Energy's dean, Holland testified that Grillot called him to his office and told him the research paper was "unacceptable."

Holland said Grillot conveyed several complaints about the study, but he said the dean's primary unhappiness centered on a policy statement recommending that the industry make its seismic and injection data publicly available.

"As I mentioned, that was one of those conversations where I was not expecting what occurred, and I wish I would have had a recording of it, and I did not have the foresight to go make notes," Holland said. "I was sort of washing my hands of where I was at and what I was doing at that point."

Holland noted that Grillot's reprimand wasn't put in writing because a "large number of open records requests" prompted internal conversations to primarily take place in person or on a phone line to avoid creating "a searchable record of conversations."

Grillot responded that “reprimand is a strong word,” adding, “I don’t recall having done that at all. Period.”

The Tulsa World asked him whether he had expressed displeasure or unhappiness with the paper in question, rather than a reprimand.

“No, not from the technical content,” Grillot said.

He then added:

“We were trying to keep a lot of constituents informed,” Grillot said. “Whether it be the sector of energy, the Oklahoma Corporation Commission and the various public and everybody else, we had discussions about how we could communicate all this stuff.”

Holland also testified that Grillot and Keller “helped me with presentations,” changing wording “and that sort of thing” for the public. He said the pair would tell him that they would receive “a bunch of calls, complaints” after Holland would present a news conference about an earthquake.

“But I also had points where the dean of the college asked to see my presentations to scientific meetings and would then wordsmith my presentations for scientific meetings, as well as at one point was asked to withdraw an abstract from a scientific meeting in Arkansas because the topic was earthquakes triggered by hydraulic fracture,” Holland said, noting that he did withdraw his abstract.

Grillot said he would “sometimes suggest changes or edits but usually only when asked.” He also said he doesn’t recall asking Holland to withdraw a scientific abstract.

“If Dr. Holland is asserting that he received pressure from me to alter his research or conclusions, that’s not true,” Grillot said. “That did not happen.”

Several times Grillot referred to the time period as “the early days” in investigating Oklahoma’s surge in earthquakes. He noted that the Prague quakes sparked much debate with many opinions, adding that a Stanford University study as recent as November 2015 still expressed uncertainty as to whether human actions triggered that sequence.

“I believe that both Dr. Holland and Dr. Keller were good scientists,” Grillot said. “I felt we had a good working relationship.”

Attempts by the Tulsa World to reach Keller, as well as Hamm, for comment were unsuccessful.

Holland declined to comment further when reached by the Tulsa World.

After the EnergyWire story was published, the Tulsa World obtained emails that Mike Soraghan used to write his report.

The emails indicate a close relationship between the industry, the OGS and the Mewbourne College of Earth and Energy. They also show that Hamm and others in the energy industry at least tried to limit the public comments of Holland and Keller, his former boss.

The emails reveal that Hamm and others encouraged Boren to leave all public comments related to earthquakes and the OGS to Catherine Bishop, the university’s vice president for public affairs and longtime spokeswoman.

In December 2013, Hamm emailed Boren, “I am glad you put Catherine Bishop in charge. This situation could spiral out of hand easily.”

Boren told the Tulsa World, “I think (Hamm) was saying that ... he was frustrated because people were taking quotes from Austin Holland or conclusions about his research out of context.”

Ultimately, Hamm was not satisfied. In July 2014, Grillot wrote to Danny Hilliard, a former legislator who is now a lobbyist for the university, that Hamm was “very upset at some of the earthquake reporting to the point that he would like to see select OGS staff dismissed.”

Staff Writer Corey Jones

Corey is a general assignment reporter who specializes in coverage of man-made earthquakes, criminal justice and dabbles in enterprise projects. He excels at annoying the city editor. Phone: 918-581-8359

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Parties pledge new thinking to solve interstate water fight

By Susan Montoya Bryan / Associated Press

Published: Wednesday, November 15th, 2017 at 10:55am

Updated: Wednesday, November 15th, 2017 at 3:11pm



FILE - This March 20, 2013 file photo shows the Elephant Butte Lake near Truth or Consequences, N.M. Farmers in southern New Mexico, water policy experts, lawyers and others are all working behind the scenes to craft possible solutions that could help to end a lengthy battle with Texas over management of the Rio Grande. Samantha Barncastle, an attorney representing the irrigation district that serves farmers from Elephant Butte south to the U.S.-Mexico border, said there's no question groundwater will continue to be relied upon into the future to protect everyone's access. (AP Photo/Susan Montoya Bryan, file)

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — Farmers in southern New Mexico, water policy experts, lawyers and others are all working behind the scenes to craft possible solutions that could help to end a lengthy battle with Texas over management of the Rio Grande.

The case is pending before the U.S. Supreme Court and all sides say the stakes are high given uncertainty about the future sustainability of water supplies throughout the Rio Grande Valley.

The New Mexico Attorney General's Office, Las Cruces city officials and agricultural interests provided state lawmakers with an update Tuesday.

Lawyers involved in the case say the court could schedule arguments early next year, but New Mexico is still open to settlement talks. Separately, the farmers, municipalities and commercial users that would be affected by a ruling have been meeting regularly to build a framework for a possible settlement.

Details of what that might look like are under wraps because of a court-issued confidentiality order.

Samantha Barncastle, an attorney representing the irrigation district that serves farmers from Elephant Butte south to the U.S.-Mexico border, said there's no question groundwater will continue to be relied upon into the future to protect everyone's access.

She said the parties are looking at managing the aquifer in ways New Mexico has never seen before. That could include more flexibility and policies aimed at avoiding the permanent following of farmland.

"All we can say is we're exploring options," she told lawmakers. "We are imposing on ourselves what we don't think otherwise could be done. We're very much outside the box and that's where these problems will be solved."

Texas took its case to the Supreme Court in 2013, asking that New Mexico stop pumping groundwater along the border so that more of the river could flow south to farmers and residents in El Paso.

In dry years when there's not enough water in the river, chile and onion farmers and pecan growers in southern New Mexico are forced to rely on wells to keep their crops and trees alive. Critics contend the well-pumping depletes the aquifer that would otherwise drain back into the river and flow to Texas.

New Mexico has argued in court documents that it's meeting delivery obligations to Texas.

The Rio Grande is one of North America's longest rivers, stretching from southern Colorado to Mexico and irrigating more than 3,100 square miles (8,000 square kilometers) of farmland along the way. Several major cities also rely on the river's water supply.

Depending on the outcome of the case, New Mexico could be forced to pay millions of dollars in damages. The New Mexico attorney general's office plans to ask the Legislature for \$1.5 million to handle the Rio Grande litigation for the next year.

Tania Maestas with the attorney general's office said the willingness of New Mexico water users to work together could lead to a "dream settlement."

"We find it to be extremely beneficial when you have the actual parties that are impacted giving you feedback, saying we're willing to do this. That's huge," she said.

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Los Padillas water project begins

By Olivier Uyttebrouck / Journal Staff Writer

Published: Wednesday, November 15th, 2017 at 6:30pm

Updated: Wednesday, November 15th, 2017 at 10:29pm



Los Padillas residents and elected officials marked the start of a \$1.9 million project to provide municipal water to the South Valley neighborhood at an event Wednesday. (Jim Thompson/Albuquerque Journal)

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — Black water came out of Jerry McCann's tap until he drilled a deep well six months ago at his South Valley home in the Los Padillas neighborhood.

McCann, 69, said he plans to hook into the municipal water system within two months when a new line is completed to his neighborhood. Even with his new well, McCann's water quality is poor, he said.

Workers broke ground this week on a \$1.9 million project to install water lines in Los Padillas, bringing municipal water to an area where homeowners now rely on private wells.

"This is a blessing for us getting hooked up now," McCann said of the project, which will allow him to use treated water in about two months. Water quality has worsened for years for Los Padillas residents, he said.



Los Padillas resident Jerry McCann, left, speaks with Rep. Patricio Ruiloba, D-Albuquerque, at the groundbreaking for the first phase of the South Valley Drinking Water Project Wednesday, (Jim Thompson/Albuquerque Journal)

“I wouldn’t even put it on my flowers,” he said of the area’s well water. McCann made the comments at a groundbreaking ceremony Wednesday at Isleta and Marcelino SW to mark the start of construction.

The work now underway is part of a phased project intended to one day deliver clean, safe water to the estimated 3,000 residents of Los Padillas in far southwest Albuquerque.

Bernalillo County is providing \$1.65 million to the project and the water utility is contributing labor and \$250,000 to complete phase 1, with an estimated completion by next summer.

Workers will install 12,500 feet of pipe to residents east of Isleta SW, just north of Interstate 25. Future work to extend lines to residents west of Isleta will be scheduled as funds are available. The total cost of the project is estimated at \$4 million to \$5 million.

Steven Michael Quezada, the Bernalillo County commissioner who represents the community, said he made the Los Padillas water system a priority shortly after he was elected to the commission in 2016 and observed the poor quality of the water there.

Quezada and others said they will seek additional funding from state and federal sources.

“We know there are other big problems, but water is just a necessity,” Quezada said at the groundbreaking event. “With your taxes, you should be getting services that everyone else gets.”

Simulation: Harvey-level storm flooding would inundate central San Antonio

By **Brendan Gibbons** | November 15, 2017 | Updated: November 15, 2017 9:29pm

2

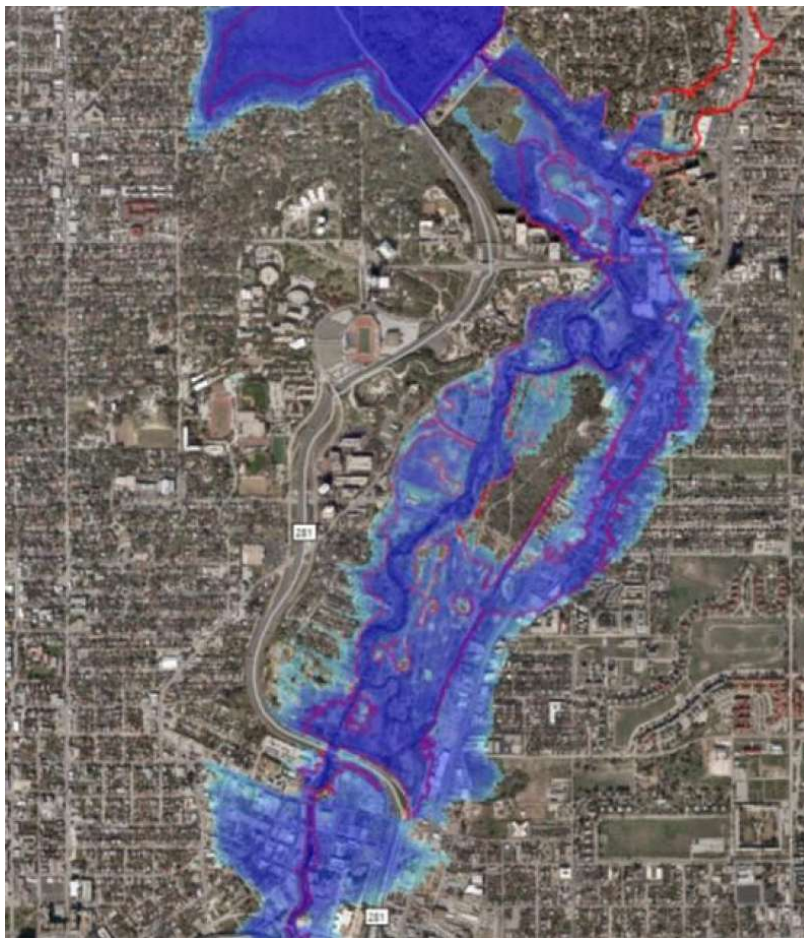


Photo: San Antonio River Authority

IMAGE 1 OF 4

A flooding simulation of the Brackenridge Park and the Broadway corridor shows how some of San Antonio's creeks and rivers would rise if the city were hit by a Hurricane Harvey-level storm. Contractors for the ... [more](#)

If a storm with the ferocity of Hurricane Harvey hit San Antonio, the river and creeks would swell and inundate the Broadway corridor, Mahncke Park, River Road, Tobin Hill, the River Walk and South Town.

Neighborhoods around Apache Creek and Elmendorf Lake on the West Side would flood as that creek jumped its banks.

These are just a few examples of what could happen in such a severe and increasingly likely rainstorm, according to computer simulations released by San Antonio River Authority officials Wednesday.

In the three months since Harvey left behind devastation in Houston and East Texas, SARA staff hired engineering firm HDR Inc. to fully gauge the effects of Harvey-level flooding if such a storm were to hit San Antonio.

In Harvey's early stages, forecasters predicted it would slam the San Antonio area, bringing rainfall amounting to 20 to 25 inches, but it veered east instead. San Antonio ended up with 2 to 5 inches.

A simulation shows what would happen if parts of San Antonio got 30 to 50 inches of rain over five days, as Houston sustained during Hurricane Harvey. The blue areas show floodwaters rising within hours and jumping the banks of local creeks and rivers. Other parts of the city would fare worse during this kind of storm, SARA official said.

Downtown



Source: San Antonio River Authority

“We’re fortunate that we didn’t experience what happened in Houston, but we shouldn’t let that take us off our guard here in San Antonio,” SARA general manager Suzanne Scott said.

The simulation involved taking all the rain that fell across Harris County over five days and superimposing it over San Antonio, with the rainiest areas — 30 to 51 inches — hovering just north of downtown.

This widespread flooding would leave a piece of U.S. 281 north of Olmos Dam covered in water for almost two weeks, said Steve Graham, SARA's assistant general manager.

The flooding wouldn't be confined to areas along creeks and rivers. Water in Concepcion Creek along U.S. 90 on the Southwest Side would accumulate behind a railroad berm and flow northeast along the tracks, eventually dumping into Alazán Creek, the simulation showed.

San Pedro Creek appears to fare relatively well among the Westside Creeks because a stormwater tunnel funnels most of its floodwaters under downtown, emerging near South Flores and Guadalupe streets.

A simulation shows what would happen if parts of San Antonio got 30 to 50 inches of rain over five days, as Houston sustained during Hurricane Harvey. The blue areas show floodwaters rising within hours and jumping the banks of local creeks and rivers. Other parts of the city would fare worse during this kind of storm, SARA official said.

Olmos Dam to Hwy 281



Source: San Antonio River Authority

Despite the potential devastation, San Antonio, as compared with Houston, has two key factors working in its favor.

There is a 1,500-foot drop in elevation from North Bexar County to South Bexar County, along with hundreds of millions of dollars in dams, locks, channels and tunnels that San Antonio has built over the past 100 years to protect its downtown.

“It’s terrible. It would be an event of record, but I don’t think it would have been quite like what Harris County saw,” Graham said.

These simulations don’t show the kind of widespread flooding on city streets or how deep the water would get in a storm like Harvey, he said. And they don’t show the worst of what could happen if the heaviest rainfall hit parts of the West and East sides, he said.

“In those watersheds, they don’t have as much infrastructure,” he said. “They would have seen worse.”

A simulation shows what would happen if parts of San Antonio got 30 to 50 inches of rain over five days, as Houston sustained during Hurricane Harvey. The blue areas show floodwaters rising within hours and jumping the banks of local creeks and rivers. Other parts of the city would fare worse during this kind of storm, SARA official said.

Concepcion Creek



Source: San Antonio River Authority

With its location on the southern edge of the Hill Country, San Antonio's wrinkled topography is a blessing and a curse when it comes to flooding. The elevation in Bexar County drops from about 1,900 feet above sea level to 380 feet, compared with a roughly 300-foot drop in Harris County.

In Houston, which is "flat as a pancake," rain formed vast lakes in low-lying areas of the city, Graham said. Here, water would rush into gulleys and canyons, inundating low water crossings and some roads within hours.

The flooding would come in pulses, with the most intense pulse unfolding over around six to seven hours, according to the simulation.

"The danger is being caught out in the middle of a storm," Graham said.

Because of this, the rainstorms that are more dangerous for San Antonio are far more common than Harvey, the heaviest rainstorm ever recorded in North America.

"A worse event for Bexar County would be to get 10 to 13 inches in six to nine hours," Graham said.

That kind of deluge is not unheard of in these parts, historical records indicate. Many call San Antonio and its surroundings Flash Flood Alley.

A simulation shows what would happen if parts of San Antonio got 30 to 50 inches of rain over five days, as Houston sustained during Hurricane Harvey. The blue areas show floodwaters rising within hours and jumping the banks of local creeks and rivers. Other parts of the city would fare worse during this kind of storm, SARA official said.

Apache Creek (Elmendorf Lake)



Source: San Antonio River Authority

In 1972, New Braunfels got around 11 inches in one hour, according to a [U.S. Geological Survey and Texas Department of Transportation study](#) from 1998. More than 22 inches fell on D'Hanis in less than four hours in 1935, and Odem got around 25 inches in four hours in 1984.

Recent research suggests global warming is making intense rainstorms more likely in Texas.

A climate summary published this month by 10 federal agencies, the Smithsonian Institution and the National Science Foundation states that the [maximum daily rainfall over a 5-year period](#) went up 13 percent between 1901 and 2016 in an area that includes Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas.

A Massachusetts Institute of Technology [study published last week](#) in the Proceedings of the National Academies of Sciences suggests that the yearly probability of a rainstorm in Texas dropping 20 inches or more will rise from 1 percent between 1981 and 2000 to 18 percent over the period 2081 to 2100.

The study relied on computer simulations of 3,700 hurricanes and made predictions based on the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere continuing upward unchecked.

But when it comes to flood risk in San Antonio, one number is most important of all: 49 percent.

That's the percentage of homes in the 100-year flood plain that carry flood insurance, according to recent Federal Emergency Management Agency numbers. Homes in the official flood plain are said to have a 1-in-100 chance of being flooded each year.

In San Antonio, a storm that produces that level of flooding would dump 10 inches over 24 hours. Most of San Antonio's drainage structures are designed to handle up to this much rainfall.

Of course, homes and business outside of that 1-in-100 zone are not free of risk. SARA has worked with FEMA to offer a more [detailed floodplain map tool](#) called RiskMAP that can help

homeowners and developers gauge their risk of flooding in a 30-year period.

“It’s not a binary decision,” Graham said. “We’re not in or out, safe or not safe.”

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Secretary Serious About Environmental Quality

By [SUE LINCOLN \(/PEOPLE/SUE-LINCOLN\)](/PEOPLE/SUE-LINCOLN) • 4 HOURS AGO



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(http://wrkf.org/sites/wrkf/files/styles/x_large/public/201711/deq_secretary_0.jpg)

COURTESY: LA DEQ

For years, it's been joked that DEQ stands for "don't even question," since Louisiana allows its industrial plants to self-report hazardous releases.

"There's some entities, if they have a release, they'll say, 'Well, nothing left the fence line,'" Dr. Chuck Carr Brown acknowledges.

Of course, that was before he became Secretary of Louisiana's Department of Environmental Quality last year.



Listen

2:00

"One of the things that I've said as I was introducing myself to the industry was, 'Don't base your business plan's success on less stringent oversight.'"

He got his bachelor's in chemistry from Southern Miss, then worked for Exxon for more than 20 years, getting his master's, then his doctorate from Southern University in Baton Rouge.

"I got my Ph.D. in public policy with an emphasis in environmental policy," he says. "Dissertation topic: 'Understanding Environmentalism Among African-Americans.'"

And, as a result, he says, "I'm very much an environmental justice advocate."

That guides him as he works to change the "don't even question" culture here in Louisiana.

"Does a plant have an obligation to be a good corporate neighbor?" Brown asks, rhetorically. "So when I look at environmental justice, I ask the question, 'What can they do to enhance the quality of life of the individuals that live near and around that plant?'"

Take air monitoring, for example.

"Louisiana has a statewide air monitoring network. We have 37 monitors strategically placed," Brown explains. "One of my goals is to increase that network and have industry pay for those monitors."

The recently announced EPA-DEQ settlement with Exxon Baton Rouge will do just that. It includes having the company provide DEQ with a \$1.4-million mobile monitoring lab. That will allow on-site, real-time analysis of air, water or soil samples around any of Louisiana's chemical plants.

Neighborhood residents, school protest plan for new concrete batching plant near Boerne

By Zeke MacCormack | November 15, 2017 | Updated: November 14, 2017 10:15pm

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Photo: JOHN DAVENPORT, STAFF / SAN ANTONIO EXPRESS-NEWS

A front end loader loads up a customer truck with material from the Huebner Road Quarry. JOHN DAVENPORT / STAFF

BOERNE — Vulcan Materials' move to establish a concrete batching plant off Texas 46 about 8 miles east of town is drawing scrutiny from Kendall County and strong opposition from a nearby school and adjoining neighborhoods.

The project has sparked the creation of a resistance group, the Pleasant Valley Neighborhood Coalition, whose members include residents in the subdivisions of Cordillera Ranch, Coveney Ranch and Pleasant Valley.

The organization hired attorney Charles Irvine this week to oppose the standard air permit sought by Vulcan from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

Doing business as Boerne Ready Mix, the application seeks permission to produce up to 6,000 cubic yards of concrete daily, operating up to 24 hours a day, every day.

Sand, rock and cement would be delivered by trucks to the site and stored there until being blended with water into concrete and trucked to construction sites around the area.

Company officials say the plant will meet or exceed health and safety requirements.

"At Vulcan, we always strive to be a good neighbor and do things the right way," company spokesman Scott Burnham said Tuesday.

Besides fear that dust from the facility will infiltrate neighbors' homes and lungs, opponents also aired concerns Monday to county commissioners about noise, light pollution, groundwater depletion and additional traffic.

"A lot of people are going to be adversely affected by this," Pleasant Valley resident Tami Stanley told county commissioners at a meeting that drew a standing-room-only crowd of Vulcan critics at the courthouse.

"We're your constituents," Stanley said, "Please, please help us prevent this from becoming the nightmare it's going to be."

The company has yet to ask the Texas Department of Transportation for a driveway permit for the 34-acre site, commissioners were told, nor sought permission to drill a well there from the Cow Creek Groundwater Conservation District.

Many opponents are associated with the Hill Country Montessori School, whose Stone Wall Drive campus— less than 2,000 feet from the Vulcan site — includes a 2-acre nature preserve where kids study plants and animals and relax.

“If they can’t guarantee safe air for our children, why would we gamble with their health?” Steve Whewell, head of the school, asked commissioners.

Vulcan officials at the meeting referred press inquiries to the corporation’s spokesman.

“I look forward to addressing all of these questions and comments down the road,” John Berger, a division general manager with the firm’s Ready Mix arm, told the audience.

After discussing the matter briefly in executive session, commissioners voted to ask TCEQ to conduct a contested case hearing on the Vulcan permit application, filed Oct. 19.

Both sides would be able to present evidence to support their positions at a triallike hearing before the State Office of Administrative Hearings, which then would make a nonbinding recommendation to TCEQ commissioners on whether to issue the permit.

“We obviously have concerns,” said County Commissioner Richard Elkins, whose successful motion also called for drafting a resolution and asking TCEQ to also conduct a public meeting on the project.

Vulcan’s application says dust collectors and water sprinkling systems will help control air pollution from the mixing operations, stockpiles of materials and vehicle traffic on the site.

Burnham asserted plant operations will meet or exceed government guidelines.

“We’re committed to operating in a safe and responsible manner and especially when it comes to protecting air quality, water resources and the health and well-being of our neighbors and communities,” Burnham said Tuesday.

Former County Commissioner John Kight said the plant could add 2,000 trucks a day on Texas 46, if it produces 6,000 cubic yards. The road's average daily traffic load now is 9,400 vehicles.

"This is a real traffic safety issue that needs to be addressed since with these slow-moving, heavy trucks there is a real hazardous potential for fatal accidents," said Kight, who also projected plant operations would require up to 200,000 gallons of water daily.

Afterward, Pleasant Valley Neighborhood Coalition members cheered the commissioners' decision to seek a contested case hearing and heard a pitch from Irvine, a Houston attorney who specializes in environmental law.

"That is huge," organizer Snehal Patel said to the crowd of 50 at the school, referring to the commissioners' vote. But, he warned, "it is really difficult to defeat these types of things."

Irvine suggested trying to convince Vulcan to find another site for its plant by driving up its costs and slowing down the TCEQ process by throwing roadblocks and objections in its path to a possible permit.

"Your whole strategy is delay, delay, delay," said Irvine, who was subsequently hired.

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http://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/environment/article_99f90816-c97d-11e7-b3da-7b1d710a7145.html

Conservationists urge action by Louisiana to restore, protect critical Maurepas Swamp

BY STEVE HARDY | SHARDY@THEADVOCATE.COM NOV 15, 2017 - 4:00 PM



A not healthy part of the Maurepas Swamp area near Manchac, La.. Experts from Restore the Mississippi River Delta provide an overview during a tour of three priority restoration projects Ð the East Maurepas Diversion, Union Freshwater Diversion and Manchac Landbridge Diversion Ð and the importance of the Maurepas Swamp ecosystem Monday Nov. 13, 2017. The tour visited the project site for the East Maurepas Diversion, which is located between New Orleans and Baton Rouge and recently received \$14 million in RESTORE Act funding. This will be the first diversion to restore swamp forest, by providing sediment and fresh water to existing wetlands in the Maurepas swamp. This diversion, working together with the Union Freshwater Diversion and the Manchac Landbridge Diversion, will also help maintain the Manchac Landbridge, which separates Lakes Maurepas and Pontchartrain and provides critical storm surge protection to surrounding communities, including Baton Rouge.

ADVOCATE STAFF PHOTO BY BILL FEIG

Steve Hardy

MANCHAC — In the distance, a few wading birds drifted over the tree stumps in the Maurepas swamp; others perched in the bleached and broken boughs of a few dead cypresses. In places, the swamp and sky meet at the horizon, an open landscape devoid of the tall tupelos that once thrived here.

Conservation groups want to see the trees tower over the marshes once again. They have implored the state to fast track several environmental projects across south Louisiana, three of which would redirect water into the Maurepas Swamp. Some parts of the wetlands remain relatively healthy, but in many places the marshes have struggled, such as the land bridge that divides Lakes Maurepas and Pontchartrain, where environmentalists took members of the media on a tour this week.

Deb Visco Abibou pulled out a satellite map. She showed where loggers etched tracks across the earth as they dragged the hardwoods out.

Story Continued Below

"It scarred the wetlands permanently, as you can see," said Abibou, of the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana.

The loggers left decades ago, but the trees have yet to come back.

The area has spent years cut off from the leveed Mississippi River and subjected to saltwater intrusion from infrastructure like the now-closed Mississippi River Gulf Outlet. With the closure of the MRGO, the water is getting less salty, and volunteers have begun to replant the cypresses. But more fresh water throughout the swamp would help support reforestation, environmentalists said.



Work moves forward on projects to revitalize lower Amite River and Maurepas Swamp

The state has identified 79 projects in its coastal restoration master plan which was updated earlier this year. Since the update, the five conservation groups — the National Audubon Society, the Environmental Defense Fund, the National Wildlife Federation, the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana and the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation — have combed through the plan and identified the projects they believe will have the largest-scale impact and can be implemented in the next five years, when the plan will again be reviewed.

Environmentalists praised the state's plan, which is "robust" and strongly backed by science, said Steve Cochran, associate vice president for coastal protection for the Environmental Defense Fund. His group just wants to make sure officials pursue the issues that will be sustainable and have the biggest effect as quickly as possible, especially now that projects can be funded with money from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill settlement.

"We don't have the luxury to go slow. We've got to move," he said.

A report the environmentalists issued Monday states that coastal land loss "poses a growing threat to some of the nation's most productive wildlife habitat, critical energy infrastructure, largest ports, busiest shipping corridors, leading commercial seafood producers, vibrant tourism economy, and other important business sectors. ... Without swift, decisive action and bold, large-scale restoration efforts, our coastal land loss crisis will only worsen."

Many of the projects they're championing are along the Gulf, but the scientists said it's also important to look inland. With so much coastal land being swallowed up due to subsidence and sea level rise, authorities also need to think of ways to protect the Mississippi River basin "from the top down," said Natalie Peyronnin, of the Environmental Defense Fund. That includes the Maurepas Swamp.

The swamp spreads across parts of five parishes: Ascension, Livingston, St. James, Tangipahoa and St. John the Baptist. Although it lies inland of the Gulf of Mexico, environmentalists say it's a vital part of the overall coastal system. They also point out that without intervention, sea level rise will eventually cause the gulf to spill over into Lake Pontchartrain, then rush through Lake Maurepas and absorb the wetlands, which would make French Settlement a nearly coastal community.

The Maurepas Swamp is a valuable natural habitat — about one quarter of the bird species native to the United States and Canada can be found there at some point during the year, said Erik Johnson of the Audubon Society. The swamp is home to creatures from bald eagles to the prothonotary warbler, which Johnson affectionately calls the "swamp canary" due to its bright yellow coloring and use to track the health of the ecosystem, like the proverbial canary in a coal mine.



How rubber ducks, songbirds help scientists study Louisiana wetlands loss

But the swamps are important for the human denizens of Louisiana as well, said Lake Pontchartrain coastal sustainability program director John Lopez.

Wetland trees and brush dampen storm surges, the water that hurricanes heave from the Gulf onto land. Under the right conditions, even a Category 3 storm could wash out parts of the Baton Rouge suburbs. The Maurepas Swamp could help lessen the impact of storm surges from the New Orleans area to the capital region, the report issued by the conservation groups states.

The five conservation groups involved are urging the state to prioritize three projects that will help save those marshes.

One diversion would bring Mississippi River water up from the Garyville area, using the existing Hope Canal to deliver fresh water to the swamp. That project has gotten some support in the form of \$14 million from the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council to perform design and engineering work.

National Wildlife Foundation scientist Alisha Renfro estimated the entire project would likely cost about \$180 million, but that when it's completed the diversion will be able to help 70 square miles of wetlands.

'Not just a beachfront problem': Map shows how BR-area homes might fare in storm surge

"These diversions can do a lot of good without much water," she said.

The conservation groups also want the state to use some of its funding, like from the Deepwater Horizon settlement, to bring river water in from the west via the proposed Union Freshwater Diversion, which would split from the Mississippi near Burnside.

To the east, the state should prioritize the Manchac Landbridge Diversion, which would re-route water up from the river into the swamps that divide lakes Pontchartrain and Maurepas, where the wetland trees have been depleted, their report states. Redirecting river water will help encourage the new trees that volunteers have been planting the past few years, the scientists said.

Others would help restore sediment near the Chandeleur Sound and the Barataria Basin, build ridges in Terrebonne Parish, create marshes south of Abbeville and protect oyster reefs off the coast.

The full report is available online at mississippiriverdelta.org/files/2017/11/MRD_PriorityProjectReport.pdf

LOUISIANA ENVIRONMENT AND FLOOD CONTROL

Environmental groups tell state to prioritize 17 Louisiana coastal projects

Updated Nov 15, 10:15 PM;

Posted Nov 15, 3:23 PM

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By Sara Sneath

NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune

Louisiana should prioritize proposed Mississippi River diversions west of Lake Pontchartrain in response to expected sea level rise, which is putting projects closer to the Gulf at risk, a coalition of national and local environmental groups said.

The Restore the Mississippi Delta group released a list of 17 coastal restoration projects on Wednesday (Nov. 15) that it said have the potential to deliver the greatest impact in fighting coastal land loss, if implemented quickly. They include inland diversions to restore swamps around Lake Maurepas.

With adequate funding, these projects could be built in the next three to five years, according to the coalition, which includes the Environmental Defense Fund, the National Wildlife Federation, National Audubon Society, Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation and the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana.

Scientists and experts from these groups analyzed 79 coastal restoration projects listed in the state's 2017 coastal master plan and prioritized large-scale projects capable of restoring and enhancing ecosystem services in the face of climate change.

The idea behind the priority list is threefold. Funding is not currently available for all of the projects in the plan. Logistically, some projects will need to be implemented first. And these are the projects that the coalition believes will set the state up for longterm success, said Alisha Renfro, a coastal scientist with the National Wildlife Federation's Mississippi River Delta Restoration Program.

Since the 1930s, the state has lost more than 2,000 square miles of wetlands. If nothing is done, the state is expected to lose another 4,000 square miles of land over the next 50 years, said Steve Cochran, the campaign director for Restore the Mississippi River Delta and associate vice president of the Coastal Protection Environmental Defense Fund.

"We believe that this moment in time is absolutely critical," he said.

In the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the state legislature created the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority and tasked the organization with creating a comprehensive plan to protect and restore the coast. The plan is updated every five years.

#ENVIRONMENT

NOVEMBER 15, 2017 / 3:28 PM / UPDATED 16 HOURS AGO

U.S. biofuels policy contributes to global warming: study

Emily Flitter



REUTERS ▼



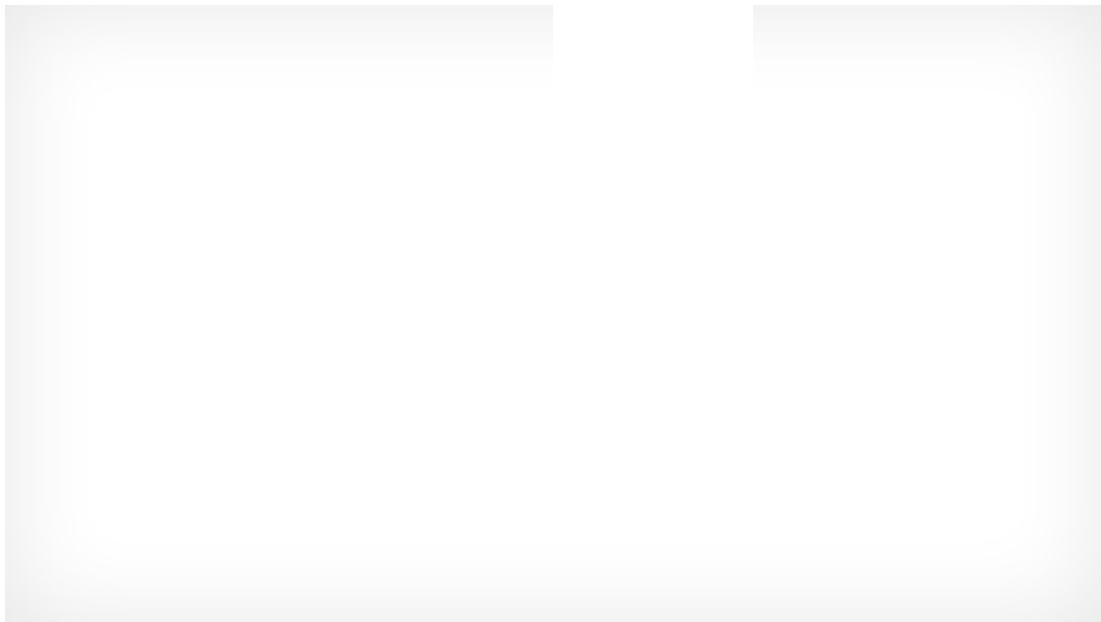
(Reuters) - U.S. renewable fuel mandates are contributing to global warming, boosting carbon emissions as farmers turn carbon-rich areas like wetlands and forests into cropland to grow corn, soy and wheat for biofuels production, a study presented on Wednesday said.

Three scientists from the University of Wisconsin presented their findings in Fort Worth, Texas, at a conference hosted by the National Wildlife Federation, an environmental group that opposes U.S. biofuels mandates in their current form.

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The scientists said it could take 50 years for biofuels to reduce carbon emissions as they were designed to do, since any reduction stemming from blending them into petroleum products is offset by more carbon emissions from clearing new farmland.

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WHAHE Federation press release.

A biofuels trade group quickly questioned the research methods used in the study, further fueling the heated debate over U.S. biofuels policy, which requires refiners to add renewable fuels like ethanol to their products.

Elected U.S. officials from farm country, including Senators Chuck Grassley and Joni Ernst of Iowa, want the Environmental Protection Agency to set annual mandates for fuel producers that maintain or raise the levels of biofuels they must blend into fuel. Officials from oil-rich states, including U.S. Senator Ted Cruz of Texas, want EPA to change biofuels laws to reduce the burden on fuel producers.

Geoff Cooper, executive vice president of the biofuels trade group the Renewable Fuel Association, said past studies similar to the one released on Wednesday “have been thoroughly debunked and disputed.”

“The authors continue to abuse and misrepresent unreliable satellite data, and they continue to present highly uncertain modeling results as if they were the gospel truth,” Cooper said.

Ernst was among a bipartisan group of Midwestern senators who briefly put a hold on an EPA nominee’s confirmation proceedings until U.S. President Donald Trump agreed to maintain current biofuels policy. Cruz now has a hold on a U.S. Department of Agriculture nominee and is seeking a meeting between the two sides, according to a letter he sent to Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds on Tuesday.

On Nov. 2, 64 members of the U.S. House of Representatives wrote to the EPA urging “well-rounded” biofuel policies.

Reporting By Emily Flitter; Editing by David Gregorio

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